

AMENDMENTS TO THE DRAWINGS

The attached replacement sheet for Fig. 3 reflects the correction of a minor drafting error, namely the reference label “12” was positioned to accurately reflect the vacuum conveyor channel, and the box depicted by the reference label “13” was extended to clarify the figure and to be consistent with the specification.

REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration and allowance of the subject application are respectfully requested. Claims 7-15 are pending in the present application, with claims 7 and 13 being independent. Claims 13-15 have been added by this amendment, which do not add any new subject matter.

Interview Summary

Applicants' representative would like to thank the Examiner, Isaac N. Hamilton, for the personal interview that was conducted on January 26, 2006. During the personal interview, the patentable features of the invention were discussed, and the Examiner agreed that the cited art fails to teach a vacuum conveyor channel.

Drawings

Applicants herewith submit a replacement sheet for Fig. 3, in which a minor drafting error has been corrected in an effort to clarify the invention, as discussed during the personal interview. Applicants respectfully submit that this replacement drawing does not add any new subject matter.

Claim Rejections Under 35 USC §112

The Examiner rejected claims 7-12 under 35 USC §112, first and second paragraph. These rejections are respectfully traversed.

On the basis of the amendments made to the claims and on the basis of the discussion during the personal interview, Applicants respectfully submit that each of the issues have

obviated. Applicants also note that the feature of a “vacuum conveyor channel” has been reintroduced into the claims and has replaced the “take-up channel,” in an effort to accurately portray the claim in view of the specification. Applicants respectfully submit that these amendments have not been made to overcome any prior art, and therefore, the scope of the claims has not been narrowed.

Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejections is respectfully requested.

Claim Rejections Under 35 USC §103

The Examiner rejected claims 7-9, 11, and 12 under 35 USC §103(a) as being unpatentable over Crum (US 3,556,509) in view of Swift, Jr. (US 1,790,559), Faasse, Jr. (US 4,556,441), and Pohjola (US 5,224,405); and claim 10 under 35 USC §103(a) as being unpatentable over the combination of Crum, Swift, Faasse, and Pohjola, and further in view of Mlodzeniec et al. (US 4,349,531). These rejections are respectfully traversed insofar as they pertain to the presently pending claims.

As noted above, the Examiner agreed that the cited art fails to teach or suggest the feature of a “vacuum conveyor channel” as recited in the claims. Thus, the alleged combination of the cited art does not teach or suggest all of the features of the claims and therefore a *prima facie* case of obviousness cannot be substantiated.

Dependent claims 8-12 should be considered allowable at least for depending from an allowable base claim.

Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejections is respectfully requested.

Lastly, Applicants respectfully submit that new claims 13-15 should be considered allowable at least because the cited art fails to teach or suggest the feature of "feeding each of the plurality of strips through the vacuum conveyor channel such that each of the plurality of strips are conveyed only by a vacuum generated within each vacuum conveyor channel," as recited in independent claim 13.

Conclusion

In view of the above amendments and remarks, this application appears to be in condition for allowance and the Examiner is, therefore, requested to reexamine the application and pass the claims to issue.

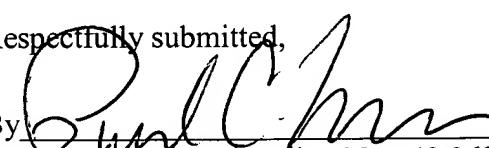
Should there be any outstanding matters that need to be resolved in the present application, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact Martin Geissler (Reg. 51,011) at telephone number (703) 205-8000, which is located in the Washington, DC area.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

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Respectfully submitted,

By


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Attachment: Replacement Drawing (1 sheet) - Fig. 3